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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANA 001604

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR SMOFFATT
AMEMBASSY NORWAY PASS TO NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT

(C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - APPROVE FOR RELEASE TO NORWAY)

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SUBJECT: CONTRABAND AND CONFUSION IN THE GULF OF ADEN

REF: SANA 1598

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On an August 8 visit to Aden, PolOffs heard from a variety of sources that smuggling -- of drugs, diesel, weapons, alcohol, and human beings -- is thriving along Yemen's coasts. These illicit flows are difficult to disentangle from legal maritime activities, as well as piracy, because they often overlap. Although the Yemeni Coast Guard's main priorities are combating drug trafficking, illegal migration, and piracy, successful interdictions are few and far between. This is the result of not only the blurry line between licit and illicit maritime activities, but also the YCG's shrinking budget, lack of deep water capability, and corruption. END SUMMARY.

A SNAPSHOT OF SMUGGLING

¶2. (C) During an August 8 visit to the once-thriving port city of Aden, the Yemeni Coast Guard (YCG), journalists, and Somali officials described to PolOffs the web of legal and illegal activities plaguing the Gulf of Aden. According to the YCG, a myriad of goods are smuggled into Yemen through the Gulf of Aden -- medicine, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, even motorcycles. Many of the items transit Yemen to reach more affluent Gulf countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, as well as onward to Europe. Somali refugees also stream across the Gulf of Aden into Yemen, while in the opposite direction, weapons are trafficked out, with the suspected involvement of some Yemeni military officials and tribal figures. Diesel smuggling out of Yemen is also a very profitable business. According to Ayman Nasser, editor of independent Aden-based newspaper al-Tariq, Yemenis can buy subsidized diesel for \$25/barrel and sell it for \$300/barrel -- often to Somali pirates. A symbiotic relationship between pirates, smugglers, shore-side informants, and fishermen engaged in illegal fishing enables criminals to conduct illicit activities alongside legal endeavors and escape detection.

¶3. (C) Many sources believe that pirates are involved in human smuggling. Colonel Lotf Baraty, YCG commander in Aden, said, "We cannot link piracy with illegal immigration directly," but argued that some people work as pirates one day and human smugglers the next -- it's just a question of what they think will be more profitable on a given day. UNHCR Representative Claire Bourgeois told ConOff on August 3 that pirates intercepted by international maritime forces claimed to be Somali refugees. According to the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia, "there appears to be an intersection between piracy and other criminal activities"

such as human smuggling. It reports that one Somali pirate group "allegedly uses the same boats employed for piracy to move refugees and economic migrants from Somalia to Yemen." However, Somali Deputy Consul Hussein Mahmood said that human smugglers and pirates are not the same actors, though he did concede that they often cooperate, sharing information regarding the location of patrolling vessels.

¶4. (C) Al-Tariq editor Nasser does not believe that Somali pirates are involved in drug and alcohol smuggling, mostly because the Yemeni smugglers do not need the pirates as middlemen. Mahmood agreed, telling PolOffs, "The pirates have nothing to do with drugs." Instead, drug smuggling is attributed to Yemeni and Somali fishermen, who send the contraband to its final destination in the GCC countries, mainly Saudi Arabia. Nasser told PolOffs that Yemeni fishermen are also major drug smugglers. "Their apparent activity is fishing, but the secret is that they are smuggling alcohol and drugs," he said. (Note: Nasser claimed Yemeni fishermen also provide logistical support to pirates. End Note.)

CONFUSION

¶5. (C) The YCG lamented the difficulty in distinguishing between licit and illicit flows in the Gulf of Aden. "When you find a boat of Somalis in the water, you don't know if they are fishermen, illegal immigrants, or pirates," Baraty told PolOffs. Mahmood related an example from April 2009, when a group of pirates captured a boat carrying 150 Somali refugees, which they used as cover while searching for ships to hijack; after two days without finding any targets, the pirates released the refugees. He echoed the YCG's concerns, saying that the lines between legal and illegal activities are often blurred. Yemeni fishermen sell fuel to pirates

while they are fishing; pirates on the lookout for vessels to hijack also fish. By doing legal and illegal activities simultaneously, one serving as camouflage for the other, the actors can conduct two profit-making activities at once.

¶6. (SBU) According to Baraty, one way to distinguish pirates from human smugglers or fishermen is to examine their equipment. Pirates are armed with weapons and ropes to enable them to hijack ships, while fishermen and migrant smugglers may have small arms, but are not likely to have ropes or RPGs. However, cargo inspection as a means of differentiating law-abiding seamen from pirates and migrant smugglers is difficult because both are often armed, and because they can easily cast their weapons and equipment overboard if maritime security forces draw near.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Although the YCG's main priorities are combating drug trafficking, arms trafficking, illegal migration, and piracy, successful interdictions are few and far between. Baraty could not cite any recent drug busts, and could point to only one case three years ago where the YCG seized an illicit weapons shipment. The Aden branch of the YCG has yet to detain any pirates on its own, relying on international maritime forces to carry out detentions and turn suspected pirates over to YCG custody. The YCG's ineffective interdiction efforts are only partly explained by the difficulty in disentangling licit from illicit flows. It is also due to the YCG's shrinking budget, its lack of deep-water capability, and corruption among both the YCG rank-and-file and high-level ROYG officials (reftel). Baraty himself alluded to some corruption within the YCG, and suspects that pirate ships may be receiving tip-offs from sailors onboard YCG ships via satellite phone. END COMMENT.

SECHE